

CD 2005--30

FACULTY *of* MUSIC



2004-2005

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Saturday, April 9, 2005
8 pm, MacMillan Theatre

University of Toronto
Faculty of Music
presents

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Raffi Armenian, conductor

PROGRAM

The Merry Wives of Windsor Overture

Otto Nicolai
(1810-1849)

Evan Mitchell, graduate student conductor

Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 19

Sergei Prokofiev
(1891-1953)

Andantino - Andante assai
Scherzo: Vivacissimo
Moderato

Min-Jeong Koh, violin
Winner of the Kathleen Parlow String Concerto Competition,
sponsored by The Sound Post and David Tamblyn, bowmaker

INTERMISSION

The Firebird Suite (1919)

Igor Stravinsky
(1882-1971)

Introduction
The Firebird and its Dance
Variation of the Firebird
The Princesses' Round
Infernal Dance of King Kashchei
Lullaby
Finale

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Program Notes

Overture to The Merry Wives of Windsor
CARL OTTO EHRENFRIED NICOLAI
Born in Königsberg (Kaliningrad) in 1810
Died in Berlin in 1849

Otto Nicolai's domineering musician-father was determined to make his son into child prodigy; and so, at the tender age of sixteen Nicolai fled the harsh regime of his home-life. Fortunately, a government official in Pomerania took pity on the boy and, recognizing his talent, arranged for him to continue his musical training in Berlin. There he studied with Friedrich Zelter and was befriended by the Mendelssohn family. A number of musical positions followed: organist to the Prussian Embassy in Rome, musical director of the opera houses of Vienna and Berlin, and also Kapellmeister at Berlin's cathedral. As well, he composed operas on a freelance basis for theatres in Turin, Genoa and Milan.

According to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, there have been seventeen operas written on the story of Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Nicolai's contribution to this body of work was composed for Vienna's Hofoper in 1847, but was rejected by the theatre's management. Nicolai resigned in protest and relocated to Berlin – where his opera was staged, to great acclaim, in 1849. Unfortunately, the composer's triumph (and vindication) was cut short just two months later, when he died of a stroke.

Nicolai's style is rooted in Viennese Classicism. However, the overture to *The Merry Wives of Windsor* also reveals the influence of early Romantic composers such as Weber – and especially Mendelssohn, whose elfin music from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* echoes throughout *The Merry Wives* overture. The piece is in sonata form, with a slow introduction, a light, sparkling first theme, and a slightly more lyrical second theme. A brilliant coda draws the work to a close.

While the opera *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is still staged in German-speaking countries, the overture is known all over the

world as a staple of the concert repertoire. It is undoubtedly Nicolai's most famous composition.

Violin Concerto No. 1 in D Op. 19
SERGEI SERGEEVICH PROKOFIEV
Born in Sontsovka, Ukraine, in 1891
Died in Moscow in 1953

A few days before the outbreak of World War I, in 1914, Sergei Prokofiev returned to St. Petersburg. He had spent some time abroad, in England, France and Switzerland; but for the next four years the Russian capital was to be his home. Already he had achieved renown as both a composer and pianist – winning the coveted Rubinstein Prize with a performance of his own *Piano Concerto No. 1* – and his talent, plus the fact that he was the only son of a widow, exempted him from military service. The turbulent war years were productive for the composer: during this time he completed the *Scythian Suite*, *Visions fugitives*, the *Classical Symphony*, two piano sonatas and his *Violin Concerto No. 1 in D*.

Prokofiev began to write a piece for violin and orchestra in 1915, originally intending it to be a short concertino. Two years later, he had completed a full-scale concerto in three movements. The piece is unique: much as the composer's formidable skill as a pianist allowed him to pursue original ideas when writing for that instrument, his status as a non-violinist freed him from convention. Instead of clichéd melody-and-accompaniment textures, Prokofiev composed a concerto in which the orchestra is never subordinated to the soloist.

Yet the work is not as far removed from classical models as it might at first seem. The first movement has two distinct thematic ideas – one lyrical and the other agitated – a development and an abridged recapitulation. Conspicuously, however, there is no real cadenza – only a few measures of unaccompanied double-

stopped counterpoint for the violin. The movement concludes with the opening theme taken up by the flute, while the violin dances around it in delicate filigrees.

The second movement is a scherzo in rondo form, marked "Vivacissimo." Except for a few big orchestral moments, the soloist plays constantly. Harmonics, glissandos and *sul ponticello* effects create atmosphere of manic virtuosity. The final movement is, loosely, a theme and variations. Here the soloist seems to accompany the orchestra as much as the reverse, often in stratospheric passage-work. The concerto ends with the violin dying away in ethereal trills that come to rest on a high D.

The first performance of *the Violin Concerto No. 1* was supposed to have taken place in November 1917 in St. Petersburg, but the Russian Revolution put a stop to this plan. In May 1918 Prokofiev left his homeland with this score (amongst others) in his suitcase, and the premiere was given in Paris in 1923 by the violinist Marcel Darrieux.

Firebird Suite (1919)

IGOR FEODOROVICH STRAVINSKY
Born in Oranienbaum, Russia, in 1882
Died in New York in 1971

Between 1903 and 1906 Igor Stravinsky took weekly composition lessons with Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov in St. Petersburg. Although nominally a law student, Stravinsky moved in artistic circles, meeting such eminent men as the conductors Arthur Nikitsch, Hans Richter and Serge Koussevitzky, the composer Alexander Scriabin and the choreographer Serge Diaghilev.

Diaghilev was sufficiently impressed with what he heard by Stravinsky at a concert in 1909 – the *Scherzo fantastique* and *Fireworks* – to ask the young composer to work for his Paris-based *Ballets Russes* dance company, orchestrating two Chopin piano pieces. At this time Diaghilev also asked the composer Anatol Liadov to write

a new ballet for Paris – but when it became apparent that Liadov would not complete his commission in time for the 1910 season, the choreographer turned to Stravinsky to write an orchestral composition based on the Russian folk-tale of the Firebird.

Diaghilev was taking a big risk: Stravinsky was unknown outside Russia, had never written such a large piece, and had less than six months to complete the piece. But at the premiere of *The Firebird*, in June 1910, the work was a resounding success. Claude Debussy personally congratulated the twenty-eight-year-old composer, and Diaghilev commissioned two subsequent ballets from Stravinsky: *Petrouchka* and *The Rite of Spring*.

The plot of *The Firebird* is easily described: the Firebird helps Prince Ivan Tsarevich rescue a group of princesses from the evil sorcerer Kashchey. Stylistically, the music owes much to the influence of Stravinsky's teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov, to whom this work is dedicated. Brilliant orchestration, programmatic narrative structure, and distinctively Russian melodic material permeate the score.

The suite performed this evening was extracted from the full ballet by Stravinsky in 1919, and is in eight short (sometimes interconnected) movements. The gloomy introduction describes the garden of Kashchey, and is followed by the glittering entrance of the Firebird, which dances while Ivan secretly watches. The prince captures the bird, but releases it when it gives him one of its magic tail-feathers. The enchanted princesses enter, and dance to Russian folk-themes played by the oboe, solo violin and clarinet. The sudden arrival of Kashchey brings a harsh, erratic music (a harbinger of *The Rite of Spring*), as the Prince struggles with the demon, and uses the magic feather to invoke the Firebird. The bird returns to the music of a lullaby, in the bassoon, that puts Kashchey to sleep – and ultimately to death. A hymn of praise ends the ballet, as the Prince marries one of the freed princesses.

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Biographies

Raffi Armenian was trained in the European tradition. In Vienna he studied piano, conducting, voice and composition with Bruno Seidlhofer, Hans Swarowsky, Ferdinand Grossmann and Alfred Uhl respectively.

Well represented on television and recordings, Maestro Armenian has conducted a television version of Menotti's *The Medium* which was nominated for an Emmy Award. He received a Juno nomination for a recording of Ravel and Schoenberg with Maureen Forrester, and the Canadian Chamber Ensemble, which he founded. In 1988, The CCE was awarded the Grand Prix du Disque from the Canadian Music Council for its *Serenades* album, which was subsequently nominated for a Juno Award. Repertoire from the Ensemble's *Music from Berlin in the 1920s* was selected by Woody Allen to underscore his film *Shadows and Fog*. Among his recordings on CBC Records include *Joyous Light*, a highly acclaimed recording of Armenian sacred songs with soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian and the Elmer Iseler Singers, and *Chants d'Auvergne*, featuring Karina Gauvin and the Canadian Chamber Ensemble in songs by Canteloube, which was nominated for a Juno in 2004.

A sought-after guest conductor, Mr. Armenian has led the Belgian Radio Orchestra, Enescu Philharmonic of Bucharest at the Ravenna International Music Festival, Montreal Symphony, Winnipeg Symphony, Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, l'Orchestre symphonique de Québec, Edmonton Symphony, Hamilton Philharmonic and Violon du Roy. In 2000, Mr. Armenian conducted members of the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra in performances with soprano Edith Wiens in chamber versions of Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and Symphony No. 4 to great acclaim.

Maestro Armenian held the position of Music Director of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony for 22 years and worked with such illustrious companies as the Canadian Opera Company, Michigan Opera Theater,

l'Opéra de Montréal, Opera Columbus, Fresno International Grand Opera and for the famed Indiana University School of Music. Kitchener-Waterloo's acoustically superb "Centre in the Square" has a main theatre named Raffi Armenian Theatre. The design was strongly influenced by Maestro Armenian.

The Armenian legacy is secured by his highly acclaimed performance of Wagner's Parsifal in which tenor Jon Vickers made his final appearance in 1989. He conducted *La Belle Hélène* at l'Opéra de Québec and Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with Opera Hamilton. Mr. Armenian is a recipient of the Order of Canada, Honorary Doctorates from Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo, and the Golden Jubilee Medal of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Director of Orchestral Studies at the University of Toronto since 1999, Mr. Armenian conducts the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Under Mr. Armenian's direction, the orchestra performed the world premiere of R. Murray Schafer's *Shadowman* with renowned percussion ensemble Nexus in 2001. The orchestra has made two successful tours to Montreal in joint performances with the Montreal Conservatory of Music Symphony Orchestra.

Evan Mitchell is very active as a conductor and percussionist. While completing his undergraduate degree at Wilfrid Laurier University he became only the second person in the program's history to win the Concerto Competition twice. He has won accolades both at home and abroad, most notably while performing with percussion virtuoso Nebojsa Zivkovic. Last year he won a coveted spot in the National Academy Orchestra program with Boris Brott. As a conductor, Evan has premiered several new Canadian works, and was the resident conductor for NUMUS new music ensemble in 2003, where he collaborated with the eminent Penderecki String Quartet. Evan recently guest conducted a performance of Robert Ward's opera *The Crucible* with the

WLU Laurier Opera Company. Evan is currently the director of the Laurier Flute Ensemble, and the assistant conductor of the Kitchener-Waterloo Youth Symphony. This term, Evan will complete his Master's degree studies with Maestro Raffi Armenian.

Born in Seoul, Korea in 1982, violinist **Min-Jeong Koh** received most of her musical training in Toronto where she studied at the Young Artist Performance Academy at the Royal Conservatory of Music. Before finishing high school in 2000, Min-Jeong went to Winnipeg and played with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra for a season. In Toronto she has been a featured soloist with the Toronto Youth String Orchestra, the North York Concert Orchestra and also in

the Mooredale series. Min-Jeong has also been a participant in such festivals as Colorado Springs, Domaine Forget, Killington, Music Bridge, New York String Seminar, and Banff where she was concertmaster of the Festival Orchestra. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Music degree at the University of Toronto, where she was awarded the Felix Galimir Chamber Music Award and was concertmaster of the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Min-Jeong studied with the late Lorand Fenyves and is continuing her studies with Scott St. John. When she is not at U of T, Min-Jeong teaches her fifteen students at Cardinal Carter Academy for the Arts, where she is an alumna.



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After a successful international recital career that began at the age of six, Canadian violin virtuoso **Kathleen Parlow** (1890-1963) made Toronto her home in 1941. Here she established herself as an important influence on two generations of students and musicians in Toronto, as pedagogue, chamber musician (Parlow String Quartet), soloist and consummate musical artist.

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Kenneth Peacock was a distinguished alumnus of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. His body of work, as a composer and researcher for half a century, has made a significant impact on musical life in Canada. The Faculty of Music was very grateful to learn that Mr. Peacock had made a bequest to the University of Toronto in his will for the benefit of our music programs. With this legacy gift, the Faculty of Music will establish the Kenneth H. Peacock Lecture Series in Music in keeping with his lifelong interest in and contribution to the multi-dimensional study of music. Thank you Mr. Peacock.

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